

A Witchford Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Many of these stories were featured in my 'Looking Back' column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014. They are supplemented by some selections 'From our Old Files' published in the Cambridge Independent Press and other notes.

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbooks' of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.
I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2016

Witchford stories from 'A Cambridgeshire Scrapbook' by Mike Petty

1900 12 10

An accident occurred at Witchford whereby a boy was killed. The deceased accompanied a yardman with a water cart for the purpose of getting a supply of water at the end of the village. This having been accomplished, the return journey was commenced. On the way, the lad, who was eight years old, fell off the heavily-weighted cart and one of the wheels passed over his head. When he was picked up it was found that he was dead.

1903 02 21

There are many colonies of Dr Barnardo's children in Cambridgeshire, and no pleasanter life for them can be imagined than the breathing of pure air and association with happy village children, whose happiness is shared by their playmates. At Witchford there are no fewer than 22 boarded out from the Home. Two girls, one six year old and her sister, eight, were given a ride by the Vicar in his carriage while he made arrangement for meetings in neighbouring villages. He is exceedingly fond of children, enjoying the company of the little ones and shared merrily in their conversation. He took them to Stretham station and they walked back home to Witchford.

1905 08 10

A fire of alarming dimensions broke out at Witchford, two cottages and a number of farm buildings opposite the church being totally destroyed. The flames attracted a large number of people, harvest fields being deserted and work suspended for the time but the flames had too good a hold. Ely Fire Brigade had difficulty finding water but eventually a pond was found and the manual engine, with some 40 men to pump, was got to work. The furniture was removed and placed in the churchyard, the various domestic utensils dotted in amongst the tombstones. 05 08 10

1906 03 16

Witchford proposed new road 06 03 16

1906 09 19

Fire broke out in a Witchford thatched cottage, flames spread rapidly and the outbuildings which consisted of a barn, stabling and pig sties constructed of tarred boards were destroyed. Flames and smoke meant it was impossible to use the well in the yard, which contained three feet of water, but a passing water cart was commandeered and its contents used to best effect. Neighbours rescued furniture but a chest of drawers containing a considerable sum of money was burnt. 06 09 19

1910 01 14

An inquest was held after the body of a Witchford shepherd was discovered on the Barway railway sidings with both legs cut off. It would appear that two trains must have passed over the unfortunate man, the driver of the second one having seen the body when it was too late to stop. He was still alive when picked up but died shortly afterwards. A verdict of accidental death was returned. The swearing of the jury by the new form of oath, each man being sworn separately, was a somewhat lengthy process, occupying nearly ten minutes. CWN 10 01 141

1914 12 18

Military road from Stretham to Newmarket proposed but road Witchford - Haddenham & Sutton - Earith Bridge not needed *
Witchford church 538th anniversary

1925 08 27

By the passing away of Mr John Young of Witchford Cambridgeshire has lost what is believed to be her last Indian Mutiny veteran. Born at Sutton in 1840 he possessed all the British fighting spirit of his grandfather who had helped the Duke of Wellington overthrow Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo. He was a 15-year-old boy when

he joined the army and two years later left for India where the never-to-be-forgotten mutiny was in progress. Often he would tell of the siege of Lucknow and the massacre at Cawnpore almost as graphically and vividly as any historian could write. On one occasion two men, one on either side of him, were shot down by the rebels, he himself sustaining no injury.

1927 11 26

The Isle of Ely County Council intends shortly to remove the constable stationed at Coveney to Wimblington and the police station would be abolished. The Coveney beat would then be amalgamated with Witchford. They discussed suggestions that the Isle and Huntingdonshire police forces should be amalgamated, but they did not know whether one Chief Constable could be able to give the same attention to two counties as he had given in one. The County Medical Officer preferred to have a Smith Premier typewriter to any British make he had seen, but Coun. Buswell said it would not do.

1928 03 22

A farmer at Pond Farm, Witchford, said that bad seasons, a fall in prices and land difficult to deal with in unfavourable seasons were among the cause of his failure. Other causes were the high cost of labour, and the Ouse Drainage Board. He took over the farm in 1915 and his father later bequeathed him some land, which was hired as smallholdings, but the tenants, surrendered it because they could not carry on. But he had an idea he could make it pay. He cleared the land with engine cultivation and ploughing but the drought set in and he got scarcely anything. Then a wet season 'did him down' and he surrendered the farm to the landlords because he was unable to pay the rent.

1941 03 21

Will,—Miss Catherine Louisa Beldam, of Witchford, who died on November 25 last, left gross estate of the value of £25,753 8s. 8d. with net personalty £16,228 15s. 2d.

1957 09 27

The Witchford House estate of Major Harry Legge-Bourke, Conservative MP for the Isle of Ely, failed to reach its reserve when put up for auction. The fully-modernised country residence was withdrawn at £6,500. It was in 1945, the year of his election, that he moved into the constituency. Previously it was the wartime home of the ex-Queen of Yugoslavia. 57 09 27

1958 05 22

Since May 15th ten outbreaks of fowl pest have been confirmed within a radius of eight miles of Ely in the parishes of Little Thetford, Wilburton, Coveney, Witchford and Manea. An order under the Fowl Pest Restrictions now comes into force and poultry may not be moved except under licence. The holding of poultry store markets is also prohibited. 58 05 22b

1959 03 05a

Sketch plans for the new Witchford Secondary School were approved for submission to the Ministry of Education. It will be built in two instalments to enable the systematic replacement of the existing temporary buildings to take place. The first instalment will start during 1959-60 at a cost of some £50,000. Messrs Concrete Ltd of Hounslow will be invited to co-operate in the design of a pre-cast concrete frame 59 03 05a

1959 04 23

The Air Ministry says the warning light on Ely Cathedral is no longer needed now that the airfield at Witchford is closed. Aircraft from Mildenhall are routed well above the height of the tower. But many people have been disturbed by extremely low-flying aircraft during the hours of darkness and US aircraft might not be fully aware of the geography of the country. Many other cathedrals had lights on them and if there was the faintest possibility of danger they should be replaced. 59 04 23

1959 08 21

Miss E.A. Ogden, has safely delivered, unaided, 50 babies a year since she came to Ely in 1939 – about one a week. The tiniest weighed only 3lb, the biggest was 11lb. One of two district nurses covering Witchford, Stuntney and Adelaide, Miss Ogden is quite modest about the whole affair. She points out that it is quite commonplace for midwives to deal with so many youngsters. But six Ely doctors gave a party in the grounds of Dr J.B. Bamford's home to celebrate the milestone. 59 08 21a

1973 05 21

Sir Harry Legge-Bourke MP has died at his London home. He came to live in Ely in 1946, the year after he won the Isle of Ely parliamentary seat from the Liberals. He farmed at Witchford for the next 12 years and named his Ely home Witchford House. Sir Harry played an active role in county affairs and was a popular and hard-working Member of Parliament. He fought eight campaigns to retain his Isle of Ely seat for 28 years. Sir Harry was often dubbed "the galloping major" for the zest with which he tackled his electioneering campaign

1979 05 14

Wartime memories came flooding back to the ex-servicemen who strolled across Witchford airfield. A giant hangar here, a derelict office there, and bits of crumbling runway everywhere: all helped them to remember the days when four-engined Lancaster bombers rumbled off the airfield on bombing runs to Germany. Other colleagues were at the nearby Shoulder of Mutton pub, supping pints & swapping yards. All were members of 115 squadron who had returned for reunion celebrations

1983 07 17

Fenland weaver Mrs Ida Allen is setting up her looms to weave tweed cloth for a firm in Japan to make ladies' coats and skirts. Her tiny workshop in Witchford High Street is far from the traditional woollen industry in Yorkshire. There is nothing she cannot tackle since her husband, Frank, built her loom; she has made college scarves, curtains and material for monks' habits and although 75 years old has no intention of retiring 83 07 17

1984 01 19

John Orton, Britain's oldest man, celebrated his 108th birthday on January 19th but died following a fall. He was born in 1876 and was the longest-married man in Britain until his wife, Harriet, died aged 103. Cambridgeshire is a good place to live: other elderly residents have included Mrs Alice Empleton who died at Sawston aged 110 when she was the second oldest person in Britain, Mrs Clara Blunt was born in Willingham 106 years ago and a Witchford woman, Etheldreda Thompson died just short of her 107th birthday 84 01 19 p16 & 84 01 31 p10

1984 09 28

The first phase of Ely's new road network – designed to take heavy traffic from the centre of the city – has been completed several weeks ahead of schedule. The section between the A142 Witchford Road and the A10 Cambridge Road together with the link road to the station will immediately ease traffic problems along the winding Barton Road – Back Hill area. It will also open up Angel Drove for industrial development 84 09 28

1987 10 14

Sedgeway Business Park at Witchford is full. The light engineering units were converted from farm buildings where pigs used to be bred and many of the companies are producing their own goods on site. The first was Gardner Prototype Manufacturing which has seen business go from strength to strength. They were joined by Knight Interiors, Camboard which makes electronic design circuits and Tertonia Products who employ seven local people producing wiring harnesses for the automotive market. 87 10 14

1988 05 19

The Ely Local Plan sets out radical proposals for redevelopment. Land between Cambridge & Witchford Road has been allocated for a light industrial estate or high-tech business park providing 1,500 jobs with new housing spreading between Downham and Lynn Roads. Two London-based development companies are vying for the change to build a new shopping centre on the cattle market site. Both would redevelop the Post Office and one would knock down the nearby Tesco store. Broad Street car park would be enlarged with a new one in Brays Lane and much of the city centre would be pedestrianised. 88 05 19a

1989 09 10b

Wrights bakery of Haddenham, which in its heyday employed more than 50 people, has closed down because it cannot get skilled staff. The firm supplied bread and cakes to shops and supermarkets for 40 years. The 4,000 sq ft factory, virtually rebuilt after a disastrous fire

in 1984, is being put on the market. They had hoped to sell the one-acre site for redevelopment and move to a smaller bakery at Witchford. But planners rejected the proposal

89 09 10b